V 1.2 08/24

This zine draws from my experience as part of the organising group behind Edinburgh Zine Festival 2022 – 2024, as well as my experience organising online events, and attending zine fairs/fests as a visitor and as a zine maker tabling.

I'm going to talk about the Covid safer measures we took at the fest, what worked, what other things we could have done, and also how much it cost. I've tried to include possibilities for no-budget DIY organising, but also exact amounts EZF2024 spent in case this is useful if you're putting together funding applications.

I feel kinda self conscious writing about this, because I don't want folks to think I'm preaching, or that I think I do a perfect (or even good) job of Covid mitigation, as an organiser or in my personal life. But I think that the more people who talk about doing

this, imperfectly, the more knowledge is shared about how you might do in ways that feel achievable or sustainable.

This is not intended to be a comprehensive guide, it is designed to prompt you to think about certain things, and offer you enough specific information to make some choices when you're organising a zine event.

Our understanding of Covid continues to develop and things change, so if this zine was made a long time before you read it, have a look online at www.zinejam.com to see if there is a more up to date version.

This zine makes the assumption that you understand the ongoing risk that Covid poses. If you're not sure, check out the recommended reading at the end of this zine first.

NB. Returning to this zine after a few more months, and a better understanding of the importance of N95s, and a renewed commitment to Covid mitigation, I do feel, and want to acknowledge, this pull back and forth. Was it sensible to organise a zine fest of this scale? If we had worked smaller, we could have taken much better Covid mitigation measures. Did we bite off more than we could chew, and in doing so did we risk our community's health, did we risk the lives of its most vulnerable members?
EZF 2024 was complicated in other ways too, but I think I'm just not sure. I also want to add that a) there were so many good things about EZF, and b) that I am only one person in a group of organisers, and my other organisers might have different opinions or reflections.

First things first - get on the same page

If you are organising with other people, it is important that you are on the same page. Early on, have an open discussion about how you understand Covid and your priorities, and whether you can work together. Your stance as a group of co-organisers will probably be different from your individual stances – they don't have to match up, and in the EZF organising group I think its fair to say we have people who all take very different personal Covid safer measures, for example. But that's ok so long as you agree what your position and priorities are as a group! Also, all this is work – and DIY organising is sometimes done at the limits of our capacity right, lets be honest. If there's a group of you, you might want to assign someone as the Covid Safer person who can take responsibility specifically for Covid safer measures and help inform organising specifically from this perspective.

Masks
Masks are an obvious way to make your zine fest Covid safer. We know Covid is airborne, and that properly wearing facemasks can reduce the risk of transmission.

Masks offer different levels of protection – fabric masks (without filters) and those blue surgical masks offer the lowest level of protection, because they don't filter out as much and they aren't very fitted to your face. N95 masks (or FFP2) offer a much better level of protection and tend to be better fitted to your face. They can be a little uncomfortable if worn with straps over the ears, but there are versions with different configurations of straps that can go around the back of your head.

Masks for organisers and tablers:
you, and your tablers, are going to be in the space for the whole day, so you're going to want to be

comfortable and well protected. N95 at a minimum! I prefer the ones that go round the back of your head for full day wearing. At EZF2024, organisers and tablers could take their masks off to drink or eat if they wanted. If we were doing a shorter fest (EZF ran 10-6 on Sat and 10-5 on Sun, because we were lining up with Fruitmarket's Artist Bookmarket timings) it would have been more realistic to ask people to keep their masks on the whole time.

Masks for visitors: This is where we fell down, I think. At EZF we couldn't afford the number of masks we would have needed for visitors to all have N95s. Instead we bought 200 N95s, and then a bunch other surgical masks, reasoning that most people weren't spending very long in the space and that some protection was better than none.

Let folks know where you stand in advance – set expectations.

We were super explicit that we expected people to wear masks at the zine fest, and that a consequence of not wearing a mask is that we might not be able to run the zine festival in the future. This was also something we were explicit to tablers about – that we expected them to wear masks if they could, and if they didn't want to, then Edinburgh Zine Festival just wasn't the event for them! I think, if we organise EZF again next year we might go even harder on this – we'll probably be in a smaller venue (thanks to Fruitmarket's non-stance on Palestine and funding from investment firm Baillie Gifford, who profit from investments in Israel), so we will maybe be more selective.

This is also something it is worth being explicit with your venue about, depending on where/what they are and your relationship with them, you might be asking them how they can support you being a masked event.

Give a tangible reason
We aren't asking folks to mask up for the sake of it. There's lots of reasons we asked people to wear masks, but we decided to articulate it in terms of: '*We have vulnerable attendees, tablers and organisers. Practice community care and wear a mask in the festival venue if you are able.*'

We also had signs that read '*Pop on a Mask*' and '*Free Masks! Please wear one inside the Warehouse when visiting the zine festival.*'

When talking about our Covid mitigations, we were always clear how it connected to our priorities for the zine fest. We had a policy called 'To The Front' which described our priorities when offering tables and was intended to address the ways that zine fests can replicate the same structural inequalities as everywhere else. In 'To The Front' we said we were prioritising disabled zine makers and zine makers who are unpaid carers. There is

no way of prioritising disabled zine makers and not taking Covid safer measures. Nevermind that Covid deaths and disability is unevenly distributed along racialised and classed lines. Nevermind that Covid poses a particular risk to older people, who are also often missing from zine events! Think critically about statements you might make about who you are platforming or prioritising at your zine event – do these statements stand up against practical measures you take against Covid.

What about people who can't wear masks? That's fine – we wear masks partly to protect people who can't wear masks themselves. We decided we had to trust people, but this is where the messaging and comms around masks was important.

Give people opportunities to put a mask on Our zine fest venue, the Warehouse, was accessed via a long-ish corridor, which meant

we could line this corridor with signs and boxes of masks. We thought about what points someone walking into the festival could chose to put on a mask. If they weren't encouraged to by the signs and free masks, we also had a box of masks at our welcome table, and our (masked) volunteers would offer these to folks who were arriving. We found phrasing this as an offer made it easier for volunteers to consistently do, and I don't think phrasing it as an ask or demand would have increased the number of people who put a mask on.

I think some people are worried about expecting people to mask at events but honestly it wasn't a big deal, especially if you can go in with a kind of confident, taken-for-granted air. You don't need to be apologetic about wanting to make your events safer for people, and asking visitors to pop a mask on for a bit is just not a big deal.

The Power of Peer Pressure – at zine fests, we wear masks.
In my experience, there is a critical percentage of people in a room wearing a mask that prompts other people to put one on – people want to fit in! So it becomes really important that any organisers, volunteers, tablers in the space are masking. They create this critical mass. This was also why we only really shared photos of folks in masks (N95s) around the zine fest on Comms - visually showing people that this was a place where people wear masks.

Practical Stuff

Costs:
We spent £267 on masks.
£117 at thefacemaskstore on 140x FFP3 (ear loops); 20x 3M Aura FFP3 (over head); and 450x blue surgical masks.

£150 on a further 600x blue surgical masks from a workwear store when we were running out.

If you don't have a budget, you could: find out whether there is a mask bloc in your area, who might be able to support you to get masks; fundraise for masks; ask for donations of masks (eg. from other masked zine fests like EZF who might have some leftover).

We spent £20 on printing posters at our local copyshop.

Guessing numbers:
If you want to provide masks for visitors it can be really tough to work out how many you need. EZF was a weird one because it was over a weekend, with long days, and running alongside the artists' bookmarket at Fruitmarket. We got through around 750 masks, and at EZF2024 this meant a mad dash

across Edinburgh on a Saturday afternoon to the workwear shop near the meadows to restock [side note: workwear shops are much cheaper for bulk masks than pharmacies or similar].

Bins:
Have bins or bin bags at the exit to the zine fest for folks who'll immediately take their mask off – this means it won't end up getting discarded somewhere random. It sucks that disposable masks generate so much waste, but it's the cost of keeping people alive if you want to have a zine fest.

Covid Tests
In an ideal world, folks would be testing before they attend – in fact in an ideal world we'd all have access to free at home accurate Covid (and influenza!) tests. In reality, tests are expensive and increasingly unreliable.

Rapid tests give a lot of false negatives, and so all a negative test means is that you might have Covid. But a positive test means you have Covid.

Given our limited capacity and budget, we decided to use tests as part of more like a harm reduction approach – if we are taking the risk of folks catching Covid during the fest, a risk which is part of any indoor event, how can we reduce the harm caused. One of the things we thought was that we didn't want the festival to result in a bunch of zine makers catching Covid and then taking it back to their communities. So, we gave every tabler a Covid test to take home and take 3-5 days after the festival and asked them to let us know the result. We hoped that this might break even at least one chain of infection. We also had tests for our volunteers and organisers obviously.

Air Purifiers

We tried to hire an air purifier from SmartAirUK for EZF 2024, but it didn't work out due to a shipping delay – so we learnt to get the air purifier delivered a few days before. Hiring a purifier involved paying out quite a big deposit (£350) which you get returned, and then the hire for the week was £170.

We were donated a small air purifier for workshop spaces. An important thing with air purifiers is paying attention to the size of your space.

You can DIY air purifiers, you could also ask around your local covid safer community in case anyone has one you can borrow. If you're working with a big venue or institution who's benefitting from your DIY kudos, why not ask them if they can purchase one? That way the legacy of your zine fest is cleaner air.

Social Distancing
Tbh, the best zine fests are not always about the most zine makers. It's a personal dislike of mine when zine fests cram you in, with no attention to fat or disabled bodies that might need more space between and behind tables. When you're thinking about how tables will be organised, you can also pay attention to social distancing – how much room are you giving each tabler?

Hand Sanitiser
I'll be honest, I sometimes forget about hand sanitiser because I'm so often focusing on other things. But, keeping your hands clean – especially when you are taking masks on/off for example – is super important.

Ventilation
The space we ran EZF in doesn't have windows – but it is a large space with high

roof. I tabled at a zine fest one summer that was in a longer narrow room, with a low ceiling, that was like a tunnel of fire. The only windows were at the far end and offered no ventilation to the other end of the room. Covid is airbourne, so you don't want air sticking around – you want it to circulate and be replenished by fresh air as often as possible. If there are windows they should be open – and you might then need to think about the time of year you're running your zine fest (so its not too cold). If you are deciding between different venues, think or ask about ventilation in the space when you enquire or look around.

Monitoring

You can buy an air quality monitor – they're between £80-£132 on SmartAirUK – or see if anyone in your community has one you can borrow. This is a good way of keeping track of the air quality in the room throughout the

event and also allows you to evaluate your Covid safer measures at the end. Did it help? If you run successive zine fests, it will also help see if any of the steps you take made a difference.

Outdoors events

I'm hesitant to suggest this from my location on the Fife Coast in Scotland, whilst there is currently a yellow warning for rain outside. Its not actually the bad weather here that is the problem, but the unpredictability. I have this idle fantasy though of a zine fest that is like a summer fete (imagine! Zine tombola! Face paint! Bake sale!) You might be able to get access to big weather proof marquees (and the expertise to set them up) through your local climate organisers. BUT! Just because an event is 'outdoors' doesn't mean you don't need to think about face masks, for example. A crowded marquee is basically just a crowded room with better ventilation.

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Online events

Even with all the Covid safer measures possible, some people still won't be able to come to your zine fest. It no good that in returning to in-person events, online events stopped being so common and I don't want this zine, in focusing on the practical side of in-person zine fests, to neglect talking about the possibilities for running online events as part of your zine fest. We've done online events a few different ways through EZF, depending on our capacity and budget.

At EZF 2023 we ran an online and in-person version of the two workshops. Personally, I'm no good at facilitating hybrid workshops, and don't have the best tech, and feel like everyone loses out a bit if I try. I'd rather run one online and then again in-person, and lean into the different qualities, formats and vibes of each. At EZF 2024 we were much lower capacity. We ran two online events – a panel and a quiz – and one in-person workshop.

Things you can ask venues when you're planning a zine fest:

What is the ventilation in the room like?
Can we have windows open?
Do you have an air purifier?
We want this event to be masked, how will you support this?
What if we want someone to leave the space?*
Where can we put posters about facemasks?

*We haven't had a problem with this, but it is good to know how much autonomy you have as an event in asking people to leave. If you're running a zine fair in a café, for example, it might be different than if you're renting out a hall.

Things I'm thinking about in the future:

Nasal Sprays and Mouthwash
There is evidence that mouthwash and nasal sprays can reduce the risk of getting Covid – specifically Iota-carrageen and nitric oxide nasal sprays. Maybe we could look at recommending or supplying these to volunteers and organisers, and also tablers?

Not organising a zine fest at all
This might be because I'm feeling pretty tired, but I think it is important to always think - do we actually want to do this? We don't just have to do things you know, sometimes we can...not do them? Or I guess, maybe I can not do them?

Further Resources:

What's up with COVID and How to Protect Yourself: 2024 Edition, Hazel Newlevant (www.newlevant.com/COVIDzine)

COVID Isn't Going Anywhere. Masking Up Could Save My Life, Alice Wong, Teen Vogue, Jan 2024
www.teenvogue.com/story/covid-isnt-going-anywhere-masking-up-could-save-my-life

Disabled People are Tired: Public Health and Ableism, Christine Mitchell, March 2022
www.disabilityvisibilityproject.com/2022/03/07/disabled-people-are-tired-public-health-and-ableism

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There is nothing radical about a zine fest that participates uncritically in the eugenicist project of “LIVING WITH COVID”.

We have a responsibility as DIY organisers to protect ourselves and each other.

WE KEEP US SAFE.

If you organise, or want to organise, a zine fest, this zine is designed to share some of the things I learnt via organising Edinburgh Zine Festival 2022-2024, and tabling at/visiting other zine fests and fairs. EZF was not perfect, we could do better – but I don’t think this should mean we shouldn’t try and keep trying and face up to the gap between how things are and how things could be. If we all did a little better, things would be a little better, and then a little better, and so on.